

Halo: Reunion of Blue Team

by FallenShandeh

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Summary: John is in over his head. Fred, Kelly and Linda are already very familiar with the situation and will help bring him up to speed... and help him learn to cope in the unfamiliar and somewhat frightening world of civilian life. John/Kelly with a few random Cortana moments. T at present, may upgrade to M later.

1. Chapter 1

John wasn't sure what to make of this. He had never run across a situation like it, not once, and especially not in training. The UNSC didn't account for unexpected human behavior.

Like a civilian not being slightly put off by the facelessness of an armored Spartan, and instead preferring that he kept his helmet on. Not that that was usually an issue for him. He was much more comfortable in full armor. But this mission wasâ€¦ slightly different. No fighting at all. Not even the tiniest bit of verbal sparring to keep things interesting. John would have said it was a milk run if not for the civvie woman who insisted on trying to press her nose against his faceplate.

The hell was he supposed to do with that?! He didn't have much in the way of personal space, but nobody got this close. Ever.

Distinctly uncomfortable, he nevertheless held his ground, holding the woman at arm's length with one hand on her shoulder. His orders were to 'get used to' civilians, whatever the hell that meant, and then once he was comfortable with their ways, report back for updated orders.

John doubted he would ever be comfortable around civilians. They were too strange. Too hard to predict. Other soldiers were simple enough. He knew where he stood. The Covenant, the Flood and the Forerunners were enemies which he now understood well enough to be able to react

to their every move on the battlefield before they even made it. But civilians? It was so long since he'd fought the Insurrection that even they seemed strange to him. Civs who didn't know which end of a rifle was the end the bullet came out of were justâ€¦ weird.

"What's the matter, Spartan? Can't handle a woman getting a little friendly?"

Err, what? His instinctive control of his face slipped and once again he was glad he was wearing his helmet. Surprise registered in his mind, as did an unfamiliar feeling. Not fear, but something related to it. And was that a little disgust in the back of his mind? Yes, definitely disgust. Enough to tell him that he wanted that woman out of his face. Now. He squared his shoulders and drew himself up to his full seven-foot-seven, trying to do that thing Kelly had described that seemed to work for her - putting out an 'offputting vibe'.

He didn't think he did it right because the civ was completely nonplussed. Finally, he fought back an irritated sigh and, keeping his voice carefully level, allowed himself to react. "I would appreciate it if you would back off." What was the thing that Kelly said to get Marines to leave her alone when they were getting a little too friendly? "I'm not interested." No, that wasn't it, but it seemed to work anyway.

Civiliansâ€¦ the hell was he supposed to do with them?

Let your discipline slip, John. Be human.

He wondered if he was going crazy. If he was, it had been going on for a long time. Cortana was gone. But he still regularly heard her voice. This time it made absolutely no sense. He was on a mission. Let his discipline slip? Absolutely not!

Have you forgotten already? It didn't take you long. Remember the last thing you learnt from me. You're not a machine. You are human, John! So allow yourself to be what you are.

Definitely going crazy. He sighed and continued on his way, wondering what was next. Maybe he should take the armor off. He would draw much less attention that way.

"But," he muttered to himself, "why would Command have allowed it in the first place if I was supposed to get used to not wearing it?"

Something told him the moment he spoke the words that he was exactly right and the purpose of this 'mission' was in fact to wean him off military life.

They were retiring him? HIM?! After all these years! He was still in his prime, more than capable of anything that the younger Four-series Spartans could do and then some.

Good, righteous indignation, so you do remember.

"Shut up, Cortana." Shouldn't have said that. Should not have said that.

I'm proud of you.

John had no idea why, but he wanted to throw something. Or put his fist through a tree or a wall. Or drop his self-control altogether and scream and break things. He wasn't angryâ€¦ this feeling wasn't something he could even identifyâ€¦ but he knew what it made him want to do. If he was meant to assimilate into civilian society, was he meant to allow himself to give in to his feelings? He didn't know. With an irritated, slightly confused grunt, he strode down an empty street, not sure where he was going. It really didn't matter. With a sense of direction like his, it was nearly impossible for him to lose his bearings. North was behind him, and as long as he knew where north was, he could keep track of where he was going without even trying.

"John?!"

He froze. That voice was familiar. Too familiar. He didn't want to believe his ears but she knew his name and had recognized him despite the fact that she couldn't see his face. "Kelly?"

"You have got to be kidding me. It is you." Something moved in the shadows. John took a moment to realize that 'something' was Kelly. By the time his mind had processed that fact, she was halfway to him, and by the time he had time to react, she was a foot away. What was she doing-?

"Uhhhâ€¦ Kelly?"

"Sorry." Kelly released his waist and stepped back. "You're still active, obviously. What're you doing here, though? There's nothing important here. Nothing that warrants a Spartan deployment."

John looked down. "I think they want to retire meâ€¦"

Kelly bumped his shoulder. Not a gesture he wanted right then. "It's rough for the first few weeks, but once you get used to it, it's not so bad. Although for youâ€¦ well, you might take a bit longer than I did. I assume they gave you a place to stay."

John nodded. "But I don't like it. There's too muchâ€¦ softness."

"You get used to that, if you want to. I didn't want to, so I bought this place with my payout." Kelly jabbed a thumb at the small house behind her. "It's great for just me, but a little cramped now that Linda's moved in. It'll be great to have the team back together again. I guess you don't know yet but Fred lives two blocks farther south."

Lindaâ€¦ Fredâ€¦ what?! "Kellyâ€¦"

"Right, sorry, all a lot to take in at once, and I'm talking too much again, so I'll shut up now. I do have another bedroom in my house if you want to get out of the hotel, but it'll be super cramped, just so you know, and-"

"Kelly!"

"What? Oh. Right." Kelly shot John an apologetic glance, let go of his hand - which, oddly, he hadn't even realized she had been holding

- and turned her eyes back to her house for a moment. "Want to come in? Linda went to get some coffee because we ran out, but she'll be back soon and then-"

"Kelly!" John took off his helmet and then, in a gesture that he enjoyed a lot more than he should have, put a finger on Kelly's lips to shut her up. There was a twinkle in his eyes and a smile graced his face as he tried not to laugh. "It's good to see you, too. Yes, I would love to come in. On one condition."

"Anything!"

"Try to tone it down just a little. I can barely get a word in edgewise." Amusement colored his tone and he smiled again. "You always were talkative, but never this bad. I almost feel like you've taken the 'rabbit' thing too seriously."

Kelly looked at him then with an expression on her face that John had never seen before. "God, you've changed. You should keep up this smiling thing. It looks good on you." She put a hand on his chestplate and then got in very close. As close as the civilian woman before, except John didn't mind this time. Having Kelly this close made him nervous, but in a different way. It wasâ€¦ pleasant.

Be human, Johnâ€¦!

His eyes slid closed of their own accord and his hands came up to carefully, gently cradle Kelly's face. Slowly, tentatively, he brought his face towards hers. His pulse thundered in his ears and he could have sworn his heart was trying to leap out of his body via his mouth. His lips brushed hers ever so lightlyâ€¦ and then he did something he had never done before. He chickened out.

2. Chapter 2

This wasâ€¦ awkward. John opted not to sit when Kelly offered him a chair, unsure as to whether this civilian furniture could support his fully-armored weight. He stood near the terminal, wondering if it was powerful enough to support a smart AI and watching Kelly as she pottered cheerfully around the kitchen. He had never seen a machine like _that_ before, but the smell coming from it was that of coffee. Civilians did _everything_ differently.

"So how long have you been in town, John?" Kelly asked him, sensing his awkwardness even though she was facing away from him.

"A few hoursâ€¦" He could have given her the exact time down to the nanosecond that he had been on this planet, but most people didn't like it when he did that. Only other Spartans seemed to get it and Kelly didn't feel like a Spartan anymore.

"Come off it, you know exactly how long, don't you?"

A smile tried to make its way to his face, but he pushed it down. "Three hours eighteen minutes forty-four-point-eight-two seconds and counting." His internal clock was almost infallible. And, thanks to what he suspected was a data-echo of Cortana, even more precise than ever.

"Better." Kelly turned to smile at him. "You need to be you. Forget how other people feel. Once you're used to all of this, then you can start thinking about others' feelings again. It took Fred ages to learn how to just react and not over-think everything. Just relax."

Relax? John looked at his gauntleted hands with one eyebrow raised. "I'll break your furniture if I sit down."

"Not what I meant, but just sit on the floor if you're that worried."

Thisâ€| 'small talk', was it? Was a new experience for John. Unnecessary things weren't said in the military, not unless they were battlefield banter and smartassery. If he was the ranking officer in the area, the only things he said were relevant to the mission, and usually only ever to non-Spartans. Spartans didn't need their orders to be given out loud. If he was outranked by someone, he only spoke if spoken to.

And if he wasn't on a mission he was either working out, eating, sleeping, or frozen.

This was very strange to him. Casual chatter regarding nothing in particular, with a friend. He hadn't experienced that in a very long time. "Why did Linda-?"

"Take off again the moment she saw you? I don't know for sure, but I think she just needs some time to process the fact that you're here. It's been a long time." Kelly grinned suddenly. "Maybe I should call Fred and let him know you're here. He was speculating just the other day about whether he was still fit enough to hold his own against an active Spartan. You guys might like to spar. And he might have something you could change into if you want to get out of that armor."

John took an involuntary step backwards, surprised. Kelly was a mind-reader. He hadn't shown a single sign of having any desire to get out of his armor and into something a little less conspicuous. "A- ahem, a spar would be nice."

"Of course," Kelly said, pretending not to hear, "Fred's stuff will be a little on the big side for you. He's bulked up a bit since last time you saw him. And you've gotten a bit leaner."

"I have?" John glanced down at himself. "I've been training for speed, but I hadn't noticed any real changes in my build."

"Only a little. Not enough for most Spartans to notice."

What did that mean? Kelly quite obviously meant something else beneath her words but John wasn't sure what. She was fast but didn't have the eyes of a sniper, so tiny details like that weren't significant enough to register in her mind. Unless it was just him she noticed changes like that onâ€|

"Here, you still take it strong and black with one sugar, right?" Kelly was suddenly in front of him with a mug of coffee in her hand.

"Uh, yeah, thanks."

Eloquent, John.

Shut up, Cortana, he thought in the general direction of his neural lace.

"Why are you nervous?" Kelly asked him, taking his right hand and pressing the mug into it. "You're so awkward. It's not like you."

"I'm not nervous," he lied.

"Yes, you are. You're talking to a _Spartan_, John, and not just any Spartan. I know your tells better than anyone. Plus right now it's so obvious that even a blind Grunt could see it."

John took a sip of his coffee, trying to calm his nerves. It didn't do much. "I don't know," he admitted. His heart skipped a beat when Kelly bumped his shoulder.

"It's okay. I was nervous too, to start with."

He wasn't nervous about the getting used to civilians thing anymore, but John decided to let Kelly think that he was. It was better than her jumping to the wrong conclusion. Or maybe it was the _right_ conclusion. He had no idea. He _had_ nearly kissed her just ten minutes ago. "Don't you get _bored_?"

Kelly laughed. "I got a job. Security, because I didn't really know how to do much else. It's just like being on sentry duty again."

"Just as boring as doing nothing," John commented.

"But our tricks to keep ourselves occupied and our minds busy don't work when I have nothing important to do, and sentry duty was always important. So for me, it works." Kelly shrugged and finished her coffee. "I'll be right back. I just need to call Fred, let him know you're here. Make yourself at home."

John had never understood that saying. Make himself at home? He'd had a couple of COs say that to him and it never felt like a genuine request, but now he got it. Kelly _meant_ it. He glanced about the room, then chose a spot on the floor next to the couch and sat down, picking up a remote and starting to fiddle. Kelly got _a lot_ of channels. The Holovisions he was used to only got military channels, but this one had over two thousand channels, including a couple of military ones. He flicked to a random channel, found a program that looked interesting, and then quickly found himself getting annoyed at how inaccurate it was.

"Oh, come on," he growled. "Marines aren't _stupid_! Those five men wouldn't be dead, they'd have taken _cover_. And Spartans might be tough, but shrugging off a _MAC_?! I don't think so!"

Ridiculous, isn't it?

"Is that meant to be _Johnson?_" John had to force his fingers to release the remote before he crushed it. "He was better than that. So

much better. How dare they?"

"Easy, John." Kelly was back. "It's just a docudrama. A very poorly researched one. Everybody knows that it's just a bunch of lies." She picked up the remote and changed the channel. "The outcry when the first episode was released was nearly enough to make the network drop it altogether. But the ratings somehow manage to be decent, so they kept it running. Hopefully there won't be a second season." She put a hand on his shoulder, then sat down on the floor next to him. "Fred says he'll be right over. I didn't even have time to finish telling him you were here. The moment I said your name he interrupted me, and then killed the line the moment he was done telling me he would be here right away."

"It'll be good to see him," John mused, unconsciously leaning towards Kelly just a little. She responded by pressing herself into his side and leaning her head on his shoulder. He twitched and then wrapped his right arm around her, pulling her a little closer. "This is niceâ€|"

"Mmm," Kelly agreed. "And it'll be nicer when it's you I'm leaning on, not your armor."

"Soonâ€| I could head back to the hotel and get my thingsâ€|?"

"That can wait, Fred will get here any second."

"Okay." Briefly, John had a strong and very pleasant mental image of Kelly pressed against his chest, her fingers linked behind his head and pulling his face down towards her. Her lips were parted and she was panting, not from exertion but from anticipation. He blinked and the image went away, but - and he didn't know why - he wanted it back. And he really wanted to make it real.

The doorbell rang loudly, and Kelly moved out from under his arm, kissing him on the cheek before all but teleporting over to the door.

John got to his feet just in time to be almost flattened by an enthusiastic Fred. "Oof!"

"Damn it, Chief, when Kelly called I thought something had happened to you again. All I got was 'Fred, it's John, he's-' and I knew I wouldn't get a word in if I didn't interrupt her." Fred released John from the bear hug he had buried him in and stepped back. "You look good. From what we know of what you've been through I expected you to be a lot more broken."

John lifted one shoulder a fraction. "I have some scars."

"Look at us," Fred said. "Blue Team back together a- wait, where's Linda?"

Kelly shrugged. "Freaking out because the last thing she expected was to see John in the living room when she got back from the store. I don't know where she went."

John raised one hand. "I do. Linda's a sniper. There are three places she would go in this city. One of them is here."

"John, she's been retired for a while now." Fred glanced at Kelly, looking for her to back him up, but she just shrugged again.

"You can take the Spartan out of the military but you can't take the military out of the Spartan," John replied smoothly. "She'll be at one of the two other places. Kelly, you're with me, we'll head for the Spire. Fred, if she's not at the Spire she'll be up the mountain somewhere."

What he wasn't telling anyone was that he thought she wouldn't be at the Spire either. He wanted Linda to have some time to process things, but didn't want her alone.

"Didn't take you long to take command again," Fred commented cheerfully. "Welcome back, Chief."

* * *

><p>AN: Thanks guys for the great reviews and all the follows! You guys are all great. I'll reply to reviews here
^.^
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**Why did I have John chicken out? Because he's unfamiliar with these feelings, and they scare him a little. He's very brave but even the bravest of people still finds some things to be too much.

>

Yes, I am still alive, lol! It's been a while. A change of pen name and a LOT of unpublishable writing [due to the fact that I've been co-writing] later, and hopefully you guys like the slight change of writing style. It's interesting how writing solely in first person for months changes your third person writing style. I'll hopefully update my other stories soon, I've been working on Regal a bit and nearly have a publishable second chapter for that now so I'll keep you lot posted ^.^^

**Love you all 3
>

~Shandeh

3. Chapter 3

As John had expected, there was no sign of Linda up the Spire. Just a lot of curious civilians who wanted to know if he was really able to do the things that the rumors said he could do. Lifting and throwing Scorpion tanks was easy, but the legends had taken things a little too far by suggesting that a sole Spartan could pick up and throw the average building and easily shrug off a direct hit from a Hunter's assault cannon. Nobody believed the bullshit that docudrama was spreading about Spartans being able to shrug off MAC blasts, thankfully, but it was still irritating having to deal with them.

Kelly shot a death glare at yet another approaching civilian, and then grabbed John's hand and dragged him up the last flight of stairs. By the time they reached the top, John had regained his balance and was smiling as Kelly locked the door behind them. Then he

swept her up in his arms, laughing when she shrieked, and carried her over to the railing. "I knew she wouldn't be here," he admitted.

"I figured," Kelly said, grinning up at him. "This is a nice spot. Fred will call my cell when he finds Linda, but let's stay here a little while after that."

"Mm." It was a noncommittal sound, but John knew that Kelly would understand his meaning just fine. He wasn't sure what he wanted, but staying at the top of the Spire seemed like a good idea.

Another strong image flashed into his mind. Kelly again, of course. Pressed against his chest like the image before, except neither of them was wearing much. John wasn't a stranger to nakedness, nor was he entirely a stranger to the idea of lingerie, but _Kelly_ in black and red lace pressed so close to him that it seemed she was trying to become part of him—

"John? John!"

"Huh?" The fantasy vanished and he blinked down at a rather miffed-looking Kelly. "Sorry. I was miles away."

"I said, we don't have to, if you don't want to—"

"No, I _do_ want to," he said a little too quickly, without thinking about his words. The fact that he wanted to stay up here with her forever was precisely his problem with staying up here. He didn't _want_ to leave. Ever. "I don't mean to be so distracted." There was no way in _hell_ he was admitting why he kept losing track of the present.

Kelly poked him on the nose. "You're silly. Let me down, I want to show you something neat."

John grinned at her. "No."

"Aw, come on, _please_?"

"You're going to have to make me." Relaxing his discipline and giving in to his mischievous side was refreshing. He decided he needed to do it more often.

Kelly squirmed until she could reach his shoulders and then used his body to springboard off in a neat backflip over the balcony rail, landing on one foot on a beam with a tiny wobble that made John want to leap the rail and grab her. They were ridiculously high above the streets below. A fall from this height would kill _anyone_, even a Spartan, unless they were fully armored. And he wasn't. He had left his helmet at Kelly's house. Kelly wasn't armored at all. But before he had a chance to move she was on her feet in front of him again, and then she had him up against a wall.

"You've always been fast," he said with a smile, "but I think you've gotten faster since the last time I saw you."

"Shhh." Kelly pressed a finger against his lips. "You owe me, for chickening out earlier."

"I didn't chicken out," John lied. "I had a feeling Linda wasn't far

away."

"Liar." There was something in her voice that kicked his heart into high gear and brought the pleasant-terrifying mental image back.

It wasn't a want anymore. He needed to make it real. There was no option of chickening out this time. Even if Kelly would have let him, he couldn't if he tried. One of his hands found the small of her back and pulled her towards him, and the other knotted itself into her hair. This closeness was at once intimidating and comfortable, and still he didn't feel close enough to her.

"Damn this armor," he growled under his breath.

Kelly's fingers linked behind his head and the light pressure encouraged him to bring his face closer to hers. She traced a circle with her thumb just below and behind his ear and for some reason that was enough to make him lose his self-control altogether. Enough to banish his nerves. With a low, hungry growl, he claimed her lips. Adrenaline surged through his body, further shattering any remnants of control.

Somehow, before John had to break away for breath, Kelly ended up being the one against the wall. He didn't know how. Panting, he reluctantly stepped back.

"Why... did you... stop?" Kelly asked him, as breathless as he was.

"I needâ€¦ to breatheâ€¦ sometime," he explained, letting out a surprised sound when Kelly grabbed him and shoved him up against the wall again.

"Chicken."

"Am not."

"Prove it, then." There was a definite glitter of challenge in her eyes as she flipped her blue hair out of her face and lifted one shoulder.

John's whole mind just went 'what the hell' and he bent his head, kissing her again. This time he had a little more restraint and the kiss seemed more suitable for the fact that they had an audience - a couple of civs who had been on the balcony when Kelly and John had come out onto it - but he was unsatisfied when, this time, Kelly broke away. He wanted more. Less metal, gel and electronics between them, for a start.

"Yeah?" Kelly said, and he finally realized that she had her cellphone up to her ear, and that it had been ringing earlier. A crease appeared between her eyebrows. "Okay. We'll be right there." She killed the line, made a face, and then looked at John again. "Fred's with Linda. He wants us there right away."

"Why?"

"He didn't say, I didn't ask. I didn't like his tone of voice, though. I haven't heard that tone in years." Kelly looked at the floor. "Not sinceâ€¦ well, not since we lost Kurt."

John needed no further explanation. He grabbed Kelly, swept her off her feet, and jumped. She might have shrieked, but he couldn't hear anything through the wind past his ears as he fell feet first. Over seventy stories to fallâ€¦ if he wasn't armored it would have been more than enough to reach terminal velocity but with armor, he was much heavier with not much more surface area, which made his terminal velocity much higher. He was still accelerating at nearly ten meters per second per second when his boots struck concrete. He absorbed as much of the impact as possible with his knees, then made sure Kelly was tucked safely against his chest, and rolled.

"Are you INSANE?!" Kelly yelled at him as she got to her feet.

"It may have slipped my mind that I don't have my helmet on." John was a bit slower to heave himself off the ground. "Are you hurt at all?"

"No, but-"

"Good." He took a few steps, then sighed. "I should've locked my gel layer. That hurt."

"Are you okay?"

"Fine. Nothing I can't walk off."

"I don't believe you."

John cast her a disapproving look he usually reserved for people who were being extraordinarily stupid. "Let's go get Fred and Linda and then we can worry about me."

"You're such a Spartan." Kelly almost smiled. "But you're right. Crazy fool. Why do you always jump?"

One of these days you'll land on something as stubborn as you are. And I don't do bits and pieces.

Great, John thought. Now he was having flashbacks of Johnson. No, he told himself. It was a memory. Nothing more.

* * *

><p>AN: So guys, I really feel like this is going to end up needing to be rated M. I'm being as subtle as I can at the moment but John really doesn't like me skirting around the topic and he's a pain to write when he's not happy with me so I'm going to have to get a bit more graphic. His fantasies will intensify and they will scare him more than a little, which should be entertaining. Enjoy.

4. Chapter 4

Fred could just see her, but there was no way in hell he was going to be able to get up to Linda. She was holed up in an old abandoned sniper nest, a legacy from the war, and chances were she had six or more different escape routes already planned. By the time Fred could get up there, she would be long gone.

He could only hope that Kelly and John would get here soon, and that one of them could talk her down. She seemed angry now. He had been watching her for a couple of minutes and her demeanor had gone in that time from shocked to sad to confused and now to furious. It didn't make much sense to Fred, but then, Linda had never made much sense to him. Back in their active days, he had at least been able to predict her, for the most part, but now he found her as confusing as civilians had once seemed.

She had to have known he was there. A sniper like Linda would never miss the presence of a Spartan. She had so far failed to acknowledge him, but Fred hoped she would calm down enough to come down and talk to him soon. He had wondered why. Why here, above anywhere else? And then the moon had peeked out from behind a cloud and light gleaming off a faceplate had brought Fred's attention to the fact that there was a MJOLNIR helmet lying in the forest, half covered with moss.

He turned the helmet over in his hands, running one finger around a large bullet hole in the back. There was no exit hole, but no sign of any remains nearby, or, for that matter, any other MJOLNIR pieces. The built-in failsafe should have detonated everything, by all rightsâ€| but somehow the helmet had survived intact. Unfortunately none of its data had. It would have been nice, he thought, to know who it had belonged to. It was standard issue Mark IV, which ruled out anyone who had been involved in the Reach conflict, as well as a good two-thirds of those who hadn't made it that far. It wasn't a team leader of sufficient rank to be declared a mission captain, or it would have had a red stripe. That left something like half.

Clearly whoever it belonged to meant something to Linda. A friend, perhaps. Down to three, then. One of the three was highly unlikely. Alice had last been seen on Harvest, on the other side of UEG-controlled space. It wasn't impossible that she might have somehow found her way here - stranger things had certainly happened to Spartans - but he doubted it. That left Amelie and Khasem. The helmet looked too big to be Amelie's. He remembered her being petite, as Spartans went, and quite easy to tell apart from the rest simply because she was smaller than anyone else.

But Khasem wasn't dead. Fred had no idea how he knew that, he just knew it, and that was good enough for him.

"Why would his helmet be here, then?" he wondered aloud, rubbing the last few lingering bits of moss and dirt off it. "And damaged like this." It was a big hole and it went through every layer of armor, electronics and gel. The hit had to have been lethal.

"It wasn't on his head when it was damaged," Linda said from directly behind Fred, who jumped about a foot into the air, cursing.

"Don't sneak up on me like that!"

"I wasn't sneaking anywhere." She took the helmet from his hands and tilted her head the smallest amount. Combined with a slightly raised eyebrow, it was her way of telling Fred she thought he was thick without actually saying the words. "Soâ€| John's back."

Fred nodded. "And Khalid isn't dead, but was definitely somewhere around here about five years ago. We could find him."

"Mmm," Linda said, sitting down on the ground and then pulling Fred down after her. "I told you and Kelly both that I didn't want any more reminders of active duty. And then John turns up and I find _this_. I can't get away from it."

Fred didn't understand at all why she would want to. Active duty was the best time of his life. He wanted as many reminders of the glory days as he could get. That was why he had his own place. He kept his armor in a display case and his dress uniform, medals included, framed on his bedroom wall. He was a Spartan, and didn't understand why anyone _wouldn't_ be proud of that fact. "I don't think you should try to. You _are_ a Spartan, and more than that, you're a member of Blue Team. With John leading us, the things we did for humanityâ€| that should never be forgotten. Or hidden from."

"Whatever." Linda got up and went to walk away, but Fred grabbed her hand and pulled her back down.

"Seriously. It's not good for you to try to hide from what you are."

Linda went to slap him, but he ducked and then backflipped to his feet. That seemed to irritate her more, for some reason. Fred lifted one shoulder in half a shrug. Women of any species were hard to deal with. It seemed anything he did or said was wrong, according to the nearest female. He sorely missed military life, where right and wrong were clear-cut and he knew how not to piss anyone off. Or how to piss _everyone_ off if John needed a distraction.

* * *

><p>Pain shot up John's legs with every step he took, and he lagged behind Kelly a lot more than he ever used to, but he kept on pushing himself to run faster. Up the mountain, around this tree, over that one, under the thick vine so as not to end up flat on his back, through the thicket of prickly bushes because the worst they could do to him was scratch his armor, unless he was stupid enough to fail to protect his head.<p>

A small scratch on his left cheek oozed blood, the result of the first and only time he had made _that_ mistake, and it stung like a bitch. But his legs were the worst by far. Nearly as bad as the time he'd run through three days' worth of drills in an hour with over eight hundred microfractures in each tibia.

We were young and stupid then, weren't we?

"What are you talking about? I was stupid. You were young, but you were never stupid." Cortana had never had stupidity in her.

Crazy, then. More often than not, 'your' crazy schemes came from me.

After she'd gotten used to the fact that John was capable of so much more than she expected, yes. Before then, thoughâ€|

Before I knew you properly doesn't count.

John shook his head and found another reserve of strength, drawing on it and blocking out the pain as best he could. A fresh burst of speed brought him close enough to Kelly that he could see her through the forest. The sight of her moving as swiftly and lithely through difficult terrain as ever momentarily distracted him and he nearly tripped over a root. The extra impacts his legs took as he ran off balance for a few strides drew a quiet grunt of pain through his teeth, but he didn't lose much speed.

"Nearly there, John!" Kelly called back to him. "I can see them now!"

"Right behind you," he growled, trying not to let the pain leak into his voice. He lost sight of Kelly again and let himself slow up a little. He sort of regretted jumping now. If he hadn't been so busy making sure Kelly didn't get hurt, he would've been able to absorb more of the impact through bending his knees and rolling than he had, and he probably wouldn't be in pain, but what was done was done.

He finally caught up to Kelly when she was halfway through a sentence.

"-alive and was here five years ago?"

Fred nodded. "The moss growth on it is about consistent with five years. No longer than seven, no less than three."

"That's a big window," John said.

"It is," Fred admitted, "but it's the best we've got. How much did you overhear?"

"Not much. Who's alive?" From their expressions, it had to be a Spartan. A brother or sister. Someone they all knew well.

"Khasem," Linda informed him.

"Then we have to find him."

"Speak for yourself!"

John had no idea why Linda was so against the idea of finding a missing Spartan. It didn't make any sense. If one of his men was alive around here somewhere, of course he was going to try to find his brother.

"I'm in," Kelly said.

"Me too." Fred glanced at Linda. "And she'll come round, Chief. Don't worry."

"It's so like you to find a complicated and difficult thing to do if you don't have anything better to occupy your time with," Kelly commented. "Blue Team's reunion mission couldn't possibly be any different."

"It's not a Blue Team reunion without Linda," John said with a shrug. "No pressure, though."

"Fine, I'll do it," Linda huffed.

"_Excellent_." Fred grinned widely. "Just a shame we're unlikely to end up having Covies to kill."

"Might have Prometheans," John growled. "The Didact might be dead, but I've still had to kill a lot of his followers in the past year. Might even have to fight a Forerunner or two if we end up chasing this trail to the right planets. Or the wrong ones, depending on your perspective."

"We don't care," Kelly told him. "Covenant hordes couldn't beat us. Prometheans and Forerunners won't either."

John admired her confidence, but at the same time considered it to be foolishness. Forerunners were much tougher enemies than anything the Covenant had thrown at humanity. "You have learning to do. All three of you. Before we chase anything, I need to make sure you understand what you're dealing with."

"Sparring?"

"Yes, Fred. Sparring."

* * *

><p>AN: Thanks for the reviews guys :)

Hukomuyo, thank you for that. Pacing is one of my biggest problems when it comes to writing. It either moves too fast, or too slow. One of my old stories, Angels of Death, is something like 28 chapters long and I still haven't even touched on the main problem of the narrative. And then there's this. I will see what I can do about slowing it down a little. Throwing something else at them for them to worry about should help.

Delta Marauder, thanks :) I like the length of my chapters at the moment. This one and ch3 are a bit on the shorter side by my standards, but I usually sit between 1500 and 2000 words per chapter, and to me that feels like a good length. All the same, I get where you're coming from. You want more and because of the small number of chapters so far there isn't much to read yet! Well, hopefully with more to work with, John and the team will give me more per chapter.

Winter's Sentinel, you're one of my favorite readers and reviewers, and I'd definitely hate to give you too much to have to skip over. I do need to let John's fantasies intensify but maybe that can be an exercise in abstract writing. I don't have much experience in writing enough to be interesting but not so much that the poor reader ends up feeling like they're reading a bad porno. I write very little in the romance field. I'll see what I can do about keeping things T-rated and will put alerts around parts that get a bit too mature, how does that sound?

**You guys are all awesome. Please let me know what you think, and any suggestions for directions for this to take are much appreciated. I've never written a fic that ships canon characters before. And no doubt Kelly, Linda and Fred are a bit out of character. It's been a

VERY long time since I read Fall of Reach. More than 5 years. I should get myself a new copy. The old copy got read so much it fell apart!**

Love always :3

~Shandeh

End
file.